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The clear call is Carter's to sound

By EUGENE PATTERSON

Adm. Stansfield Turner is another of those surprise personalities you find in the Carter Administration when you see him close-up. You could tell from the CIA director's pictures he'd be a handsome seadog, square-rigged and blunt-bowed, with wolf eyes that seemed to be counting his destroyers.

He'd already made a reputation for ruthlessness by cleaning house at the intelligence agency, posting pink slips like battle flags. And from earlier exchanges with him, I'd learned he was insensitive to the reason why the press wants him to stop hiring foreign journalists as CIA spies.

"WE TELL THE nations of the world we're for a free press everywhere, and urge them to believe reporters can operate free of government taint," I'd told him, "but your agency of the U.S. government turns around and reserves the right to subvert journalists of every other nation except our own."

"If I had the New York correspondent of *Pravda* working for me, which I don't," he'd replied, "would you want me to fire him?"

All Navy, all business, no doubts. Or so he'd seemed.

So it was a surprise to find, when he got up to address a Washington Press Club banquet, that he's a warm and articulate speaker with a politician's flair for engaging an audience. He was smooth and smiling and expressive, by no means a gruff and arbitrary admiral. As an ingratiating public speaker, the man is a pro.

SO WHEN HE took his seat to heavy applause I asked him where he got his way with words, since they don't teach civilian oratory at Annapolis. He laughed and told a story that may cast some light on President Jimmy Carter.

"The President and I were talking the other day about our different routes to the Naval Academy," he said. They were there at the same time although they scarcely knew one another then. Turner finished higher academically, and with the top midshipman's rank.

Turner explained he had done his preparatory studies at Amherst in the liberal arts before he transferred to Annapolis, whereas Carter had done his preliminary work in engineering at Georgia Tech.

The future admiral said he therefore found the humanities easy but had a hard time with the engineering courses at the academy. Midshipman Carter, on the other hand, breezed through the engineering classes, and had to work hard to catch up on the humanities.

I TOLD TURNER that surprised me. The President had always struck me as a hu-



Adm. Stansfield Turner (left) and President Carter each had very different backgrounds before entering the U.S. Naval Academy. AP

manist tuned to a certain folk poetry despite his low-keyed reticence, and that Turner's own image had been one of a by-the-numbers, no-nonsense engineering admiral, untroubled by the finer points of philosophy.

"See, that's your problem," Turner laughed. "I've been telling you guys in the press I'm human, that I'm really a very nice guy."

He was centered on himself in this light chat and intended no irony directed at the President. But the conversation sticks, as one sees Carter's rating sink in the public polls. There's no doubt he brought to the White House an engineer's mind — meticulous, logical, ordered, retentive.

And it's equally clear that his campaign appealed to the humane if not the emotional instincts of the public. He struck up some deep political kinship with the people who voted him into office. What happened?

HE'S THE SAME man, and he's been talking in the same quiet way as President, at least until last month when he suddenly toughened up and adopted a much more forceful tone in public. His direct rebuke to lawyers at the lawyers' meeting in Los Angeles Thursday sounded bellicose, even Trumanesque.

Did the public tire of the low-keyed nice guy it had voted for? Or was a dully efficient

engineer getting too far removed from his rural folk roots with which the voters had identified, and striking no fire anymore from the flints a political leader must tap to kindle political responses?

The guess here is that Carter himself, and his country advisers like Charley Kirbo, detected a danger that he might be putting the country to sleep — that a little more Amherst and a little less Georgia Tech might be indicated.

An engineering mind is good to have around in a time of complications. But Carter couldn't have come from a peanut patch to the presidency without possessing some humanist dimension that can reach responding instincts when he chooses to turn it on.

MAYBE HE'S BEEN too careful, too cool and cautious, in presenting his engineer's blueprints to Congress and the country. Most people don't read blueprints.

But they do listen when a President with just a little sense of drama interrupts the public slumber with a call of compelling clarity. Carter, as engineer, has perceived the need for America to wake to compelling dangers. Now, as President, the clear call is also his to sound.

He seems in recent weeks to be tuning up, and recalling a lesson he and Stansfield Turner did learn at Annapolis: The very first step toward getting a shipboard message communicated goes, "Now hear this."